

Meeting 3: Tuesday 16th June 2026

Visit to the Saxons exhibition, Aylesbury

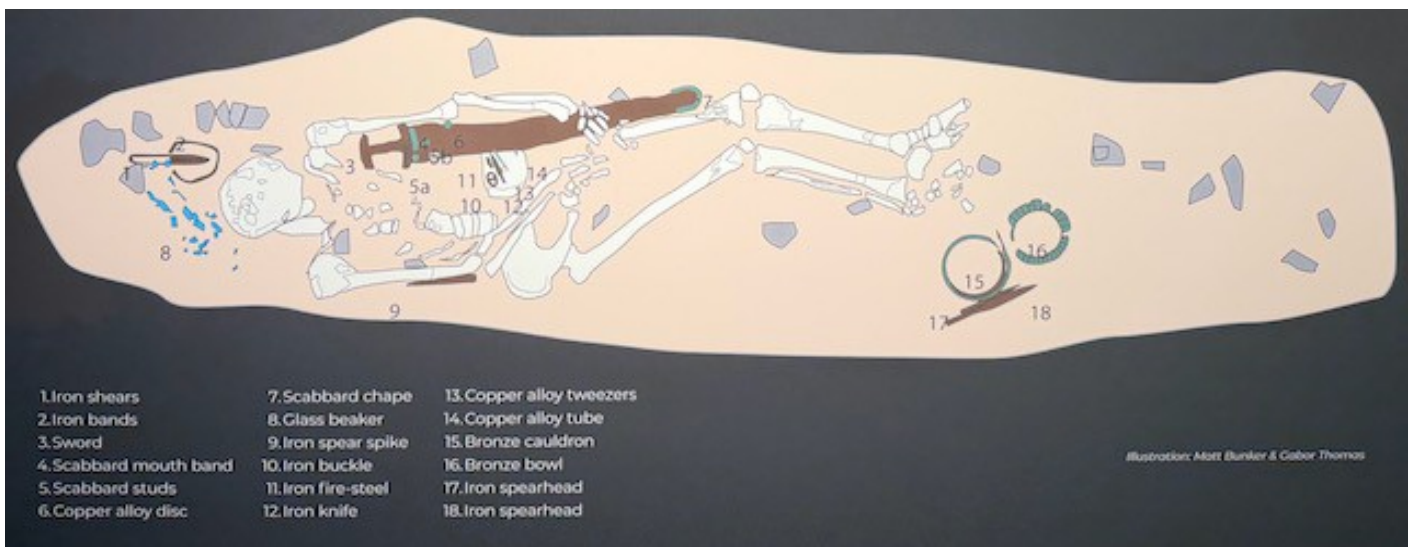
Fifteen members took a trip to the Discover Bucks Museum for a private view of their special exhibition, Saxons. This was led by the museum's chief archaeologist, Brett Thorne. He gave a very comprehensive and detailed tour, and good humouredly responded to many questions.

The exhibition focuses on three burial sites from the early medieval period that marked the arrival of Saxons from present day north Germany and Denmark following the Roman withdrawal. It includes artefacts from each site, details of research carried out, and very detailed reconstructions of the graves as they would have been on the day of burial.

Brett was keen to point out that far from being the Dark Ages, this period had a rich culture – different from the Romans (for example not using writing or currency) but well organised and successful.

Marlow warlord

Discovered recently, initially by a metal detectorist, then subject of a full excavation, on a hill near Marlow, the remains of a high status individual were buried with a sword, two spears and some small personal items. Unusually for the time, this was a single burial. The date is 500 to 550. He was tall and powerfully built, about 194cm tall when the average male height was 170cm. Heavily developed leg muscles suggest he may have been a frequent horse rider. He was about 40 years old when he died. He also had two large bronze bowls which were imported from Europe, and a valuable glass beaker. Large eating and drinking vessels often relate to a leader who holds feasts for his men (as at Sutton Hoo). DNA testing shows his ancestry is Northern European or Scandinavian. Either he or his parents came from this area, which perhaps explains the origin of his sword, which was of a style from that region – perhaps an heirloom.



Above: layout of the Marlow grave as found: the detectorist first uncovered the bronze vessels 14 and 15 and far left. Later the skeleton was uncovered, holding the sword, left with modern replica

Taplow mound

A more elaborate burial was discovered 150 years ago. Though the excavation was botched, elaborate grave goods were found and enough information to reveal that the body had been laid out in a wooden chamber set below ground level, with grave goods all around him, before being buried under a massive earth mound. Rich grave goods included many similar items to Sutton Hoo, including a gold and garnet belt buckle a large bronze vessel from Syria, spears and a sword, and many pottery and glass items. Much of this reflected links to the Sutton Hoo culture, including the chamber burial and the belt, thought to derive from craft skill in the Kent kingdom, whose king was initially the overlord of Rædwald, the East Anglain king buried there. The quality of some of the artefacts is incredible and hard to imagine how this culture could create details at the limit of human visibility without magnifying aids. Before Sutton Hoo this was the richest burial found in England, and the artefacts have been loaned to this exhibition by the British Museum. [More details here.](#) Maria, one of our members, decided to visit the Taplow mound next day. It's perfectly accessible, on the Taplow Court estate, just over a mile from Taplow station on the GRW line to Reading. Pictures on our WhatsApp group.



Top: Taplow burial (digital and physical reconstructions for the exhibition and below, the gold and garnet belt buckle; drinking horn mounts (on a modern representation of an auroch horn); and glass drinking vessels (the techniques used have not been able to be reproduced by modern glass workers)

Wendover cemetery

The most recent discovery was during excavations of sites on the route of HS2, which undertook major archaeology prior to construction. A village cemetery was uncovered in its entirety (though the village itself is yet to be found). The series of graves (plus a few cremation urns) reflect that these are burials from the general populace, with few (and often no) grave goods. Unlike the high status burials, the male:female ratio is roughly equal. A common finding is pairs of brooches used to pin together the over garments of female burials. Both male and female are usually found with a knife at their waist – a utilitarian tool for many uses, including eating.

For members who were unable to attend, the exhibition continues until November 2026. [Link to the website](#). One of our members decided to visit the Taplow mound next day. It's perfectly accessible, on the Taplow Court estate.

Next month

On 16th July we are visiting the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford for a private tour of their archaeological collection, including European Neolithic and ancient Egyptian galleries. Details of how to get there will be circulated shortly. The cost of the tour is £10 per person. Members will be required to make their own arrangements to get there and back. This will be limited to 15 members but there are still places available.

Later proposed events are listed on our webpage: [click link here](#).

Keith Mason

21 June 2026